SOCIETY OF PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS
NORTHERN CALIFORNIA CHAPTER

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February 19, 2021

Office of Senator Bob Wieckowski
Senate District 10
State Capitol, Room 4085
Sacramento, CA 95814-4900

RE: SPJ NorCal's Support for SB 274

Dear Senator Wieckowski,

The Society of Professional Journalists, Northern California Chapter ("SPJ NorCal") is pleased to support Senate Bill 274, which would require a legislative body to email a copy of, or a website link to, the agenda or all documents constituting the agenda packet, if a member of the public requests delivery by email.

SPJ NorCal works to support journalists throughout Northern California by engaging in, among other things, public advocacy and educational outreach to working journalists and journalism students. It is a chapter of the national Society of Professional Journalists ("SPJ"), the nation's most broad-based journalism organization.

As an association of journalists and open government advocates, we attest that Senate Bill 274 would help journalists reporting on local government, and would modernize and streamline the policies of agencies across the state. Many Californians depend on local news to inform them when matters affecting their interests are on upcoming meeting agendas, and timely press coverage leads to robust and informed community input.

SB 274 also would advance the Brown Act's stated purpose. In its opening provision, Government Code section 54950, the Brown Act states:

> In enacting this chapter, the Legislature finds and declares that the public commissions, boards and councils and the other public agencies in this State exist to aid in the conduct of the people's business. It is the intent of the law that their actions be taken openly and that their deliberations be conducted openly.
>
> The people of this State do not yield their sovereignty to the agencies which serve them. The people, in delegating authority, do not give their public servants the right to decide what is good for the people to know and what is not good for them to know. The people insist on remaining informed so that they may retain control over the instruments they have created.

SB 274 would further this purpose by ensuring that journalists can access public meeting agendas consistently and promptly, and can arrange to cover the most important public meetings.

In turn, this would ensure that information about those public meetings actually reaches the eyes and ears of the citizens and voters who are entitled to it. Journalists serve as surrogates for the public when they report on public proceedings. (*Richmond Newspapers, Inc. v. Virginia* (1980) 448 U.S. 555, 572-73; see also *Cox Broadcasting Corp. v. Cohn* (1975) 420 U.S. 469, 492 ["[I]n a society in which each individual has but limited time and resources with which to observe at first hand the operations of his government, he relies necessarily upon the press to bring to him in convenient form the facts of those operations. [. . .] Without the information provided by the press most of us and many of our representatives would be unable to vote intelligently or to register opinions on the administration of government generally."].)

We support Senate Bill 274 as a civic engagement measure that will make it easier for community members to participate in local government discussions in their areas of interest, and for local news reporters to provide accurate and informed reporting on these discussions for California communities.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Christine Peek, SPJ NorCal Freedom of Information Committee co-chair
Lauren Smiley, SPJ NorCal Freedom of Information Committee co-chair